

Reaching Global Competence

The ability to communicate with respect and cultural understanding in more than one language is an essential element of global competence.* This competence is developed and demonstrated by investigating the world, recognizing and weighing perspectives, acquiring and applying disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge, communicating ideas, and taking action. Global competence is fundamental to the experience of learning languages whether in classrooms, through virtual connections, or via everyday experiences. Language learning contributes an important means to communicate and interact in order to participate in multilingual communities at home and around the world. This interaction develops the disposition to explore the perspectives behind the products and practices of a culture and to value such intercultural experiences.

The Need for Global Competence:

Global competence is vital to successful interactions among diverse groups of people locally, nationally, and internationally. This diversity continues to grow as people move from city to city and country to country. The need to communicate with someone of a different language or culture may arise at any time; knowing more than one language prepares one to know how, when, and why to say what to whom.

Need in the Global Economy: Import and export data demonstrate the interconnectedness of the economies of countries across the globe; jobs increasingly depend on collaborating with clients/customers who speak other languages and contribute diverse perspectives and ideas; employers identify cultural knowledge and understanding plus communication skills in more than one language as increasingly important in their hiring.

Need in Diplomacy/Defense: The military identifies its mission balanced between defense/peace-keeping around the world and building connections with citizens in areas facing unrest or war; training of service personnel includes cultural sensitivity, understanding of diverse perspectives, and strategies for communicating with local populations speaking other languages.

Need in Global Problem-solving: Issues related to the environment, health, and innovation require collaboration across borders; creative solutions are more likely to occur when knowledge and unique perspectives and insights are shared.

Need in Diverse Communities: Opportunities to interact with people who speak other languages and who have different cultural practices, products, and perspectives are increasing in each community; heritage communities are supported when their languages and cultures are valued rather than eliminated.

Need in Personal Growth and Development: Global competence – the ability to interact and communicate with people from other cultures – opens doors to new relationships, knowledge, and experiences.

Describing Global Competence:

Global competence is the ability to:

1. Communicate in the language of the people with whom one is interacting.
2. Interact with awareness, sensitivity, empathy, and knowledge of the perspectives of others.
3. Withhold judgment, examining one's own perspectives as similar to or different from the perspectives of people with whom one is interacting.
4. Be alert to cultural differences in situations outside of one's culture, including noticing cues indicating miscommunication or causing an inappropriate action or response in a situation.

5. Act respectfully according to what is appropriate in the culture and the situation where everyone is not of the same culture or language background, including gestures, expressions, and behaviors.
6. Increase knowledge about the products, practices, and perspectives of other cultures.

Means to Achieve Global Competence:

Individuals will follow different pathways to reach global competence. Developing global competence is a process that needs to be embedded in learning experiences in languages and all subject areas from prekindergarten through postsecondary. Identified by the various initiatives around this common goal, effective practices include the following actions:

1. Recognize the multiplicity of factors that influence who people are and how they communicate.
2. Investigate and explain cultural differences as well as similarities, looking beneath the surface of stereotypes.
3. Examine events through the lens of media from different countries and cultures.
4. Collaborate to share ideas, discuss topics of common interest, and solve mutual problems.
5. Reflect on one's personal experiences across cultures to evaluate personal feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and reactions.

* Global competence is a critical component of education in the 21st century, as reflected in national initiatives focused on literacy and STEM at the PK-12 level and included in the essential learning outcomes of the Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) program of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U).